

A MERRY LITTLE VISIT WITH AUNTIE



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A MERRY LITTLE VISIT WITH AUNTIE



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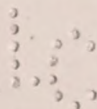
"Auntie Grace sat out on the shady porch, sewing and watching." See page 18.
Frontispiece.

A MERRY LITTLE VISIT WITH AUNTIE

BY

MARY D. BRINE

AUTHOR OF "SUNNY HOURS," ETC., ETC.



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Dedication.

LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO ALL MY DEAR LITTLE
FRIENDS AND READERS.

MARY D. BRINE.

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A MERRY LITTLE VISIT WITH AUNTIE.

CHAPTER I.

STARTING OFF ON THE VISIT.

UPSTAIRS in a dear little bedroom of a certain city house a sweet-faced mamma was packing a tiny trunk with some simple, dainty clothing. The clothing belonged to a dear little girl named Gracie Moore, and she was going to make a merry little visit to her "very dearest Auntie Grace," for whom she had been named just seven years ago.

The little trunk was almost quite ready to be locked and strapped, and it would soon be time to go to the train. While Mamma was putting in a few last belongings,—which she thought her young daughter might need in the country village where Auntie Grace lived,—little Gracie, perched, with dolly in her arms, on the broad window seat, awaited the summons to get her hat on, and make ready for the start from home.

"We're going to have the bestest time that can be, dolly," she said, giving her pretty wax doll an extra squeeze and producing (because of a hidden arrangement about the doll's throat) a funny little squeak which

Gracie imagined to be a cry, a laugh, a speech, or a cough, according to the necessity for either.

This time it was supposed to be a *laugh*, for dolly, of course, was as glad to be starting off on a visit as her

little mistress was, and so there were several squeaks in succession as Gracie talked to her doll there on the window seat. Doll Angelina had been a present to little Grace from big Grace, and that was why the little niece loved it so. She was going to take it with her, because she thought it would please Auntie Grace to see how well she had taken care of the dolly, and because, in case



“ Little Gracie, perched with dolly on the broad window seat, awaited the summons to get her hat on.” Page 7.

—just *in case*, you know—she should be lonely, Angelina would be a great comfort to her. Presently

Mamma shut down the lid of the little trunk and locked it, and then the strap was securely buckled about it and the tag with Gracie's name and destination attached to the handle.

"Now, little girlie," said Mamma, "we must get our hats on, for the carriage will be here in a moment. I don't know what I shall do without my little Gracie for two whole weeks, but I'm sure *she* will be having a splendid time, and will come home with such a brown little face I shan't be sure it belongs to Gracie."

Gracie sighed,—a very unusual thing for *her* to do,—and, jumping down from her seat, crossed the room and slipped her hand into her mother's hand. Her little face had suddenly grown grave, and she said in a plaintive voice, as unusual to her as the sigh had been:

"Mamma, dear, I'm beginning to be 'fraid, I truly am."

"Why, Gracie!" exclaimed Mamma, "how long has that notion been threatening you? What is there to be afraid of in a merry little visit to Auntie?"

Gracie hung her head. "Well, you see—you see, Mamma dear, it 'll be so lonely going on the cars all by my own self, and—oh, dear! the cars might tumble over and hurt everybody in them, and—if the cars didn't do *that*—anyway I might get lost, and—I'm truly 'fraid, Mamma. I guess I'd just better go and see Auntie some other time; can't I, Mamma?"

Mamma looked at the little trunk, all packed and ready for its journey, and then at her little white-cheeked girl, and then, lifting Gracie on her lap, she answered:

"Now, darling, you know that I shall miss you, and want you every hour of the day, and that it is because your going away is for your own good that I am willing to let you go. Think how sick you have been, and how you have lost the roses out of your little cheeks, and how much you need this little change of air and scene; and remember what the *doctor* said about it. But most of all, remember the *dear Jesus* to whom you say your little prayer every night and morning. Don't you think you are as safe in His care when traveling as when playing about your own home here? Why, Gracie, have you forgotten that wherever we go, God is always with us, and that we ought to feel as safe and confident of his care as though we could *see* Him and take hold of His hand in very reality? Mamma has prayed that her little girl may have a safe journey, and you must not be afraid any more. I want you to get well and strong—and I'm sure you will—and you and I will say a prayer for each other every night and morning, darling, and then, of course, we won't be afraid of anything. Now come, for I hear the carriage at last."

Gracie put her fears all away, and felt ashamed of herself for having forgotten even for a moment that Jesus would be watching over her all through her journey; and in a trice her little coat and pretty hat were on, while the trunk was carried downstairs, where good nurse Bridget was waiting for "one last good-by from the darlint."

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY.

LITTLE Gracie trembled a good deal when Mamma had at last lifted her into her car and put her in charge of the conductor of the train, and with many loving kisses had bidden her good-by and watched the train roll out of the depot; yet she soon winked the tears out of sight, and, holding Angelina very tightly in her arms, found courage to look about her and at her fellow-passengers. The conductor was a very nice man, and having a little girl of his own at home, of course he took a great interest in Gracie, and had promised to take the best care of her and see that she was delivered safely into her auntie's hands when the train should arrive at Milton station, where Auntie was to meet her. It would only be a train ride of about three hours, and no change of cars on the way, so you see little niece Gracie was as safe as though she had been one of the "grown-ups," and with Angelina for company in her comfortable seat in the parlor car, where the kind conductor had placed her, she made up her mind that she would not be a baby and cry, "even though her throat *did* feel so lumpy and bump-ity," but would amuse herself as the big passengers did, only she wished *she* had a paper with pictures in it, as

the old man in front of her had. There was one very funny picture on the page he was looking at, and if she stood up just a minute she could see it. After thinking it over a few moments she decided to do so, but she had a little feeling in her heart that it wouldn't be quite



"Little lambs at play." Page 13.

polite to look over anybody's shoulder; so just after she stood up she sat down again, and then the man turned the page of his periodical, and she couldn't see it anyway.

The cars sped on and on, and Gracie finally wearied of looking out upon the flying houses and trees, and all the outside scenes which seemed to dash

by the car windows in one perplexing mass of green and white.

She was glad when after a time the train stopped at a little country station, and she could look at the scenes about her window with more comfort. She liked to see

the people on the platform, some of whom were coming aboard the train, while others who had gotten off the train were looking for their baggage busily; and there were some who were only loungers there—men and boys and girls who liked to see the train come in, and stood about “*busy doing nothing*,” as the conductor laughingly remarked to the brakeman. She saw in a field nearby some little lambs at play. They seemed to be quite alone, with no mamma-sheep at hand, and Gracie decided that, like *her* mother’s little lamb, they were out on a visit all by themselves, and were trying to be as happy as they could, away from the ones they loved best of all.

But the noise of the escaping steam must have frightened them, for they stopped nibbling grass, and lifted their woolly heads anxiously, and seemed undecided whether to run or stay and watch the big black thing that puffed out smoke and steam so fiercely.

Just as the train began to move again, Gracie remembered a little rhyme Mamma had taught her when she was too little to read it herself. So she leaned back in her seat and said it over softly to herself, and to Angelina, of course, who was still in her arms and still staring at nothing. The rhyme ran this way:

THREE LITTLE LAMBS.

Three little lambs in the meadow at play,
All in the shine of the bright, happy day!
Little white lammies, so merry and free,
Just like a bit of a girlie like me.

*I am a dear little lamb ; that I know !
And Jesus 's the shepherd who's loving me so !
And nothing can hurt me by night or by day,
For Jesus is with me, wherever I stray.*

Gracie said this over correctly, and then she sang it in her mind, keeping time with the "choo-choo" sound of the train. But after a while she grew restless, and a loud yawn suddenly escaped her. Then the old gentleman in front turned around.

"What's the trouble, little girl? Tired out?"

"Oh, please excuse me, sir," she said. "I didn't know I was going to do it, and disturb you."

The old gentleman laughed. "Guess you didn't do much disturbing, you mite of a child, you." He turned about in his chair so that he could the more readily look at Gracie. "Got tired of looking at nothing, didn't you? What were you wondering about? Come! *I'm* wondering what *you* were wondering."

Gracie laughed. "Oh, *I* was only just wondering what my dear mamma was doing now 'thout any little Gracie round the house. That's all, sir. 'Twasn't much, but I felt sort of—sort of"—the little voice trembled, and Gracie swallowed a small lump which suddenly seemed sticking in her throat.

"There, dearie, don't feel badly," said the old man, as he leaned forward and put some picture papers in her lap. "See—here are such a lot of funny pictures! they'll almost make that young lady on the seat beside you there laugh out aloud with you."

Gracie gave a little giggle, for the old gentleman was so jolly in his manner she forgot the lump she was trying to swallow. She was so glad to have the pictures to look at, and thanked her new friend so prettily that he thought her one of the nicest children he had ever seen.

"How is it, my dear, that you are traveling alone and obliged to leave your mother?" he asked.

"Well, you see, I was pretty sick with a cold a little while ago, and the doctor made me stay in bed a long while, and I got so tired and weak that I was pale, and Mamma said I looked like a little white flower. She told my Auntie Grace about it, and then Auntie Grace said I must come up and stay with her a little while. But I couldn't go then 'cause I was too tired to leave Mamma, and so I waited till I was real well, just as I am now; and then Auntie wrote again, and said I must come up and be 'topped off,'—you know that means *finished up well and strong*—Mamma said Auntie meant that,—and so I'm going to Milton to-day, sir; but Mamma wouldn't go 'cause she didn't have time."

"And so there's no one to take care of you, eh?" the old gentleman remarked. "Never mind; I'll——"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied Gracie; "Jesus is taking care of me, and I'm very safe. 'Sides, Mamma put me in charge of the conductor, and he's going to put me in Auntie's care."

"And who's Auntie? I live in Milton, too."

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried Gracie, "that you live in

Milton! Auntie's name is Auntie Gracie Grey. Do you know her?"

He shook his head. "No; I've only lived there a little while. I bought an old farmhouse at the extreme end of the village, and I don't know many people yet. Never mind; maybe I'll meet you, little Blue Eyes, some fine day. I love little children, and I'm going to get acquainted with all I find around my way in Milton."

Then he told Gracie to look at her pictures, and he would take a little nap; and he glanced at the smiling, placid Angelina, and, with many a twinkle in his eyes, told that waxen young girl to "be sure and not laugh too loud over Gracie's pictures—and wake him up"; which funny speech—"just as if Angelina had been a live, real child"—made Gracie giggle again, and very soon she forgot all about being homesick, and amused herself with the pictures and with reading the easy words, as little seven-year-olds do, you know, and then—why, how soon it seemed?—the train gave a whistle, and began to go more slowly, and then slid softly and smoothly alongside of a broad platform. The brakeman and conductor from each end of the car shouted "Mil—ton!" and the old gentleman in front of Gracie grabbed his big traveling bag and his cane, and said to Gracie, "Here we are!"

The car stopped, and immediately the kind conductor came along and took Gracie's hand in his, while she held Angelina close in her other arm, and in a

minute or two the little girl was standing on the platform, looking around at the crowd of people and keeping close beside her little trunk, which the porter had taken from the train. The nice conductor had gone back to the train, but he had spoken to the depot-master about her, and left her in good care. So Gracie waited and wondered and watched anxiously for Auntie, and was just ready to cry with fear and disappointment, when the baggage-master came to her, saying:

“Little miss, if you’re bound for Miss Grey’s house—here’s her woman asking for you. Miss Grey didn’t come, but you’re all right, just the same.”

Then he took her out to the little phaeton, where a neat and good-natured maid was seated, holding the reins and trying to keep a restless little pony quiet.

She quickly explained that Auntie Grace had had a caller on some very important matter just as she was about to start for the station to meet her little niece, and therefore she had been obliged to send Ann—the maid—in her place. Gracie politely said “it didn’t matter,” but in her heart she felt as though her visit hadn’t begun very nicely, for the joy of meeting Auntie at the depot had been a great anticipation for our small traveler.

CHAPTER III.

THE DRIVE FROM THE STATION.

AUNTIE GRACE sat out on the shady porch, sewing and watching. I think she really did more watching than sewing, if the exact truth were told, for she was expecting every moment to see the little pony phaeton turning the bend of the road down by "Willow brook," and she intended to go to the gate and wave her white piece of work with might and main the very moment the phaeton should appear.

Auntie Grace had felt very badly when she found that she could not go herself to meet her dear little niece. It had happened so unfortunately, she thought, that her friend should have called just as she was ready to start for the station. But—as Ann had explained—the call was an important one, and there was no help for it, so Auntie had shared the disappointment with Gracie, and, ever since her visitor had gone, had devoted her thoughts to the little visitor, who by that time was well on the way, and chatting with Ann as merrily as her disappointment would let her. Ann had told her about the new kittens in the stable, and about the poor motherly hen who had hatched out—not a brood of

little chickens, but a nestful of little ducklings; and when they persisted in running to the big pool and paddling in the water, because that was the most natural thing for little duckies to do, the poor anxious old hen didn't know what to make of it, and squawked and clucked herself out of breath to call her children out of danger. Gracie laughed very heartily at that, and Ann was so pleased at the result of her efforts that she thought of some more funny things to tell, and so shorten the rather long drive home.

"Let me see!" she said. "Oh, yes—I must tell you what Benny did to the cat the other day."

"Who's Benny?" asked Gracie rather anxiously. She was just a wee bit afraid of boys, because she had been teased by one once, and made very miserable by his throwing Angelina to another boy and making a ball-tossing frolic out of the smiling waxen young lady. "Where does he live?"

"Oh," said Ann, "he's only a little boy. Why, I don't believe he's any older than you, and he lives quite near your Auntie. He's a nice, quiet boy, and he's glad you're coming,—your Auntie told him, you know,—and he said he hoped you'd play with him sometimes."

"I'm 'fraid of boys," replied Gracie, "'cause they're teasers, you know, and—and—they mostly aren't good to little girls' dollies either."

Ann laughed. "Oh dear, that is too bad! but Benny isn't that kind, Miss Gracie. Oh, no; he's a quiet boy, and he lives with his grandma in a little bit of

a house, and helps her all he can, like a good little boy."

"Is she sick?" asked Gracie, becoming interested in Benny's affairs.

"Oh, no; but she hasn't much money, and Benny likes to do errands for people, when there's any errand a *little* chap can do, and he earns some pennies in that way, and puts them all in a little tin box which he says is his grandma's bank, and she lets him do it because she says it makes him feel more like a little man and adds a great deal to his pleasure; though of course she isn't so poor but what they live very comfortably in their plain way."

"I think Benny won't be a teaser, and I'm going to like him," said Gracie, shaking her golden head up and down for emphasis of her decision. "But—what did he do to the cat?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot that," said Ann. "Go 'long, Dobbin! we're in a hurry, you must know," shaking the reins as she spoke. Then she settled back in the seat and began: "Well, Benny has a dog, you know, and he likes to teach it tricks, and you'd be surprised if you could see how smart that dog really is. Well—our cat and Ben's dog are good friends. That's funny, isn't it?—because cats and dogs usually don't agree. But somehow Fido the dog and Blackie the cat made friends long ago, and they visit each other like real good friends. One day Benny saw a circus, and he saw a dog trotting around with a monkey on its back, so he said he guessed

our cat was as good at a trick as a monkey, and he knew his dog could do any trick he wanted to teach it; and what did he do one day but tie kitty on Fido's back and make 'em ride around the yard a number of times. Of course Fido didn't care, but Blackie did, and she mewed, and spit, and clawed Fido's thick hair; but she couldn't get off, and every few moments Benny would stop them and pet them both and give them some nice little treat to eat, and then start them off again around the yard; and, do you know, that cat got so that she liked it, and was as good as a lamb after that. And one day what do you think she did? She ran and jumped on Fido's back of her own accord, and the minute he felt her there he began to trot around just as when Benny was training them, and Blackie had hard work to keep on, because, you see, she wasn't tied. But she did keep on, and when Ben saw her doing that, he petted her almost to death, and gave her plenty of 'treat' to eat; and she's always ready, ever since then, to show her little trick."

Gracie clapped her hands gleefully and cried, "Hurrah! Hurrah for Benny and his dog and his kitty! Oh, I'm sure I'll keep on liking that kind of boy. I'most hope I'll see him very soon; do you s'pose I will?"

"Why, there he is now, the little rogue!" laughed Ann, pointing with her whip to a clump of bushes a short distance away, where an old fence ran along a vine-tangled bank, and separated the roadway from a farmer's field of grain.

Leaning beside the old fence rail, Benny watched the coming of the phaeton. He was a nice-looking little

fellow in spite of the fact that he had red hair and a very freckled little face. His eyes were blue, like Gracie's, and he didn't look the least bit like "a teaser," Gracie decided, as she leaned forward in the phaeton and took a good look at him.

"What a funny chicken he's got on his shoulder!" she whispered to Ann.

"Oh, that's Ben's pet quail," laughed Ann.

"He's a great one for pets, you

know, and he tamed this one when it was little, and he found it with a broken leg in the woods, where it had



"Leaning beside the old fence rail, Benny watched the coming of the phaeton."

somehow got hurt and helpless, poor thing! Benny cured it up, he and his granny together, with bandages, and now that quail knows his whistle and flies to his shoulder when he calls her. He's kind of bashful, and so he wants to see you without your seeing him, and he thinks we can't see him in that shady place up there on the bank. Wait! I'll call him."

Ann pulled the pony to a stand-still, and was just going to call Benny, when Gracie was caught by a fit of shyness, and drew herself back behind Ann so suddenly that doll Angelina—who, strange to say, had been forgotten during Ann's entertaining accounts of Benny—slipped quietly over the low side of the phaeton and lay forlornly in the dirt and dust of the road, while the phaeton started on again, and Benny, who had dodged under the bushes when he saw it stop, emerged again and watched it roll away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARRIVAL.

ANYWAY, I've seen her!" said the little boy to his quail. "I've seen her, quailie, an' I know, sure's anything, she's the kind that's going to be nice, an' I won't be 'fraid of her nose bein' turned up at us." He put the bird on the fence rail, patted it for good-by, and jumped over the huddle of weeds and vines all about him down to the road, where the first thing he beheld was the unfortunate Angelina, still smiling and contented as usual, though her waxen skin was scraped and soiled with dust and her fine dress had plainly been under one of the phaeton wheels, so close to the pretty little feet that it was a wonder the poor doll had escaped entire destruction.

"Hello! guess she dropped her doll! Ain't any such fine dolly round *this* place, I know; so this one came from the big city, sure 'nough, along with Miss Grace's little city niece. I can take her doll to her, 'n' then I can see her, an' she'll be sure to like me, 'cause I found her doll."

Meanwhile Ann and Gracie were fast nearing the bend in the road where Auntie Grace would be able to see and wave to them. Gracie had not had time to think

of Angelina even yet, because Ann had been relating some more funny tales, and Gracie thought she had never had such a beautiful drive before. Presently the bend was turned, and Ann said, "Now, then, Miss Gracie, who's that? I see somebody; do you?" pointing to a pretty white cottage up the road.

Gracie screamed with delight. "Oh! oh! it's Auntie Grace, and she's waving to us!"

Standing up in the phaeton, she pulled her little white handkerchief from her pocket and waved back again as fast as her little arm would go.

"Hello! Hello! Hello, Auntie Grace!" cried she; and the pony pricked up one ear and hurried on as though he had great sympathy with the little girl's eagerness, and determined not to keep Auntie Grace waving and waiting and watching one moment longer.

When the phaeton presently stopped before the gate, Gracie hopped out like a little grasshopper, and Auntie caught her in a pair of loving arms with a big, tight hug, you may be sure.

"Here you are at last, darling!" she said, "and how glad I am to see my girlie again!"

"The little trunk will soon be here, Miss Grey," said Ann as she drove on to the barn. "The man said he'd bring it soon as he could."

"There's a present for you from mamma in my trunk," said Gracie as she followed Auntie up the steps to the cosy little porch.

"That's good news," laughed Auntie. "And how is

Mamma now-a-days? and when is papa coming back from his long journey?"

"Mamma's pretty well," replied Gracie, "but I guess she's sad to-day, 'cause she's used to seeing me round the house, and she don't feel real good without me, I'm 'most quite sure; and papa isn't coming back till two weeks longer, 'cause his last letter said so, and I noticed Mamma looked pretty disappointed 'bout it."

"Oh, that's too bad," said Auntie, as she helped her little visitor "cool off" after the long, dusty drive, and filled the pretty ornamental bowl on the washstand with cool water for bathing the little face and hands.

"You didn't bring Angelina, did you? I surely expected to have a visit from her too."

Gracie gave a frightened jump, and looked around the room. "Oh, I've lost my dolly! I've lost my dolly!" she cried, almost sobbing over the terrible discovery. "Auntie Grace, I did bring Angelina! Oh, I did bring her, and—why! I haven't seen her for ever so long, and I don't know when she got losted!"

Tears filled the blue eyes, and the sweet lips trembled pitifully. "Oh, Auntie, do you think we'll ever see Angelina again?"

"Cheer up, darling," replied Auntie. "Very likely she slipped to the floor of the phaeton. When you are washed and nicely cooled off, we will go out and look for Angelina. She's safe enough, never fear." But Gracie, while she went on with her toilet, felt that a great cloud had come to shut off a good deal of her

sunshine, and she did a great deal of thinking while Auntie was brushing the tangles out of her hair and the dust from her dress.

"There, now, come down, and we'll have poor little Angelina out of her loneliness in a jiffy. She must be tired of lying all this time in the bottom of that phaeton."

Gracie shook her head. "I'm 'most sure my dolly isn't there, Auntie Grace, 'cause I'd surely seen her when I got out, and Ann would have found her, anyway. Oh, dear! I've lost Angelina way off in the road, and she's all run over and dead by this time!" The little voice was so mournful that Auntie wanted to laugh, and to say that she didn't believe it had hurt Angelina much to be run over, and she would smile during the process of being killed, just as sweetly as she smiled always under all circumstances, pleasant or disagreeable. But Gracie felt her little trouble to be so real, and Angelina was so really dear and important a person in the little girl's opinion, that Auntie hadn't the heart to make fun about it; and when they had searched the phaeton and the floor of the tidy little barn, and still the missing Angelina did not appear, Auntie really felt sorry for Gracie, and promised to send Ann down the road to hunt for the dolly, even if she had to drive back to the station.

"Oh, the doll can't be far away," said Ann, when Gracie went upstairs, "for Miss Gracie had it in her lap just before we came to the high bank along the wood-road, you know, Miss Grey."

"Do you mean where we saw that Ben boy?" asked Gracie eagerly. "Oh, I remember! I did have my dolly there, 'cause I thought she was tired, so I pulled her eyes shut and—and laid her down in my lap, and then Ann told me such nice things I forgot to remember Angelina any more. Oh, dear! oh, dear! she must have got lost right there, and—and"—the soft eyes filled with tears, and the excited little voice trembled—"I loved her more'n ever before, 'cause she was such comp'ny for me in the lonesome cars, you know, Auntie, and I *specially* loved her 'cause you gave her to me, too."

Then, like a flash, something she had forgotten,—far more important to remember than the lost dolly,—came into Gracie's head, and she grew quiet on the instant as she said:

"Mamma whispered to me, just when she kissed me the last thing, to be sure and not forget to say a little thankful prayer when I got here, 'cause we ought to be grateful when Jesus lets us have safe journeys, and I—oh, Auntie dear, I truly forgot 'bout it, and I must say it now. May I put my head in your lap and say it, Auntie? Oh, dear! no wonder I lost my dolly; I'm sure it was because I forgot my promise to Mamma."

So the dear little girl knelt beside Auntie, and put her face down in the lap so lovingly offered her, and she lifted her earnest voice in these words:

"Dear Jesus, I'm a *forgetting* child, but I love you, and thank you in my heart all the same for your kind-

ness in bringing me safe here to-day, and will you please take good care of my dear lonely Mamma while I am gone from her, and please bless Auntie and me, for Jesus' sake?"

Then she wondered whether she might not ask that dear Jesus also to help her find her dolly, and her little heart felt quite sure that he would "pay attention" to her wish if she really asked him to; so she said: "Auntie, 'cause Jesus loves little children, He likes to help 'em be real happy, doesn't he? and I'm going to ask Him to help me find my Angelina. Don't you think it would be a good plan?"

Auntie Grace stooped and kissed the sweet little face lifted so gravely to her, and comforted Gracie by replying:

"Certainly, darling. Don't you remember that God wants *all* his children—grown up ones as well as wee lambs like you—to tell Him about all our troubles, and ask Him for all we would like to have, and then leave everything to Him who knows just what is really best for us? You know Mamma has often told you that, and the Bible tells us all that our dear Lord knows every secret of our hearts; so you may always ask Him, with perfect trust, darling, for all your little child-heart longs for, and He who loved and blessed little children when He lived on earth will understand all you want Him to."

So down went Gracie's head again, and the childish petition was made, and the little troubled heart was lightened.

She had a strong faith that in some way her beloved doll would be restored to her, and possibly she might find it on the road if she went right out and searched for it.

So Auntie called Ann, and told her to get ready to go with Gracie and hunt up the missing little companion of Gracie's journey.

But while the little girl and her aunt were standing on the porch waiting Ann's coming, who should appear at the gate but Benny himself.

"Why, Benny, how do you do?" asked Auntie.

Benny held up the doll, and, pointing to Gracie, said: "Guess she dropped it. Anyway, I found it where the phaeton stopped, along back a piece."

Gracie gave one wild scream of delight, and ran like a little deer down the path to meet Benny. "Oh, you dear, kind boy!" she said, forgetting to be shy, and thinking only of her recovered treasure. With Angelina in her arms she flew back to Auntie, and then—strange to say—she grew shy, and remembered that she did not know Benny yet.

Benny's heart had gone straight out to Gracie when she spoke her impulsive words at the gate, and there were twinkles in his eyes as he followed Gracie up the path to the porch, where Miss Grey made them acquainted speedily, and the two little hands met in greeting.

CHAPTER V.

GRACIE AND BENNY GET ACQUAINTED.

RACIE whispered to Auntie, and then said, "'Scuse me just a little minute," to Ben, and then she ran up to her little room and gave the recovered doll a squeeze, and, carefully wiping some dirt from the waxen face, squeezed it again tenderly, and was delighted to hear the fond, familiar "Mamma!" squeaked out once more.

"There, now, I know for sure 'n' certain you ain't the leastest bit hurt, and I feel better in my spirits!" she said, as she laid her doll safely away in the bureau drawer. Then she sped downstairs and into the garden again, and Auntie left her with Benny presently, for he was so much at home there he could show her all about, and tell her just the best way to amuse herself.

"I'm going to write Mamma and tell her I've got you safe and sound," said Auntie, "and when your little trunk comes, I'll call you."

"Well, let's go and find Blackie," said Ben. "She's the best cat that you ever saw."

"Oh, yes; Ann told me 'bout Blackie and your dog. She made me laugh so much," replied Gracie; "and told me 'bout the tricks you taught them."

Ben was delighted.

"Wish I had Fido here now; I'd make him do things; you'd see how smart he is."

"You're smart, too," said Gracie, "to make 'em know how."

Ben thought she was the nicest little girl he ever saw. He enjoyed being thought "smart," and meant to keep up his reputation, and planned to teach Fido and Blackie as many new tricks as he could.

They went into the barn, and Ben called, "Blackie! Blackie!" A soft mew answered him, and in a few moments a lovely black puss appeared, and, going to Ben, rubbed herself against his little legs lovingly.

Gracie was delighted. She dropped upon the floor, regardless of her little new dress (though the barn floor was neat as a pin), and called "Blackie!" in a sweet, coaxing little voice, which Blackie had no thought of resisting, for she walked over and arched her glossy black back for Gracie's loving hand to touch. "Oh, you be-*yew*tiful Blackie!" said Gracie. "I'm sure I love you already, and bimeby I'll love you lots more; 'most as much as I love Angelina." She pulled pussy up close to her breast, and put a kiss right square on the soft pink nose, while the cat purred loudly with pleasure.

"There! now she loves you and me together!" cried Ben; "and I'm glad. I don't like being loved all alone; it makes you so lonesome, you see. Say—Gracie—I'm jolly glad you dropped your doll and let me find her, 'cause I dunno 's I'd had courage to come so soon and get

'quainted with you. I knew you was comin', but you bein' a city girl, an' I only just a country feller, you see, I was scared, thinkin' you wouldn't play with me."

"Of course I'd play with you!" said Gracie. "I'd be a 'proudy' if I wouldn't. Mamma says country boys are nice boys, and Ann told me you weren't one of those teasers little girls who like dollies are 'fraid of." Then she explained to Ben her grievances against certain boys at home, and he won her gratitude still further by his sympathy and his indignation against Angelina's enemies.

"Let's see the chickens next!" said Gracie, after Blackie had concluded that she had had enough petting for a while, and had taken her departure. "I like the chickens, they're so *feathery*; and oh! Ben, show me the hen that didn't want the little ducks to go in swimming. Ann told me 'bout them, too."

So Benny took her to the coop where Mother Hen and her unusual children—a lot of little ducks—were enjoying themselves, and presently Ben got permission to let them out into the yard, where there was a tempting little pool of water, arranged on purpose for the little ducks to swim about in. Then their fun began, and poor Mamma Hen's trouble also; for the moment those odd babies of hers saw that pool, they spread their little wings and waddled as fast as they could to the water. The poor anxious old hen strutted about on the edge of the pool, clucking loudly, and seeming so miserable that Gracie's tender little heart pitied her, and she and Benny drove the brood back into the coop very soon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRUNK ARRIVES.

RACIE! Gra—cie!" It was Auntie's voice, and Gracie said, "Oh, I guess my trunk has come, for Auntie Grace said she'd call me when it came. Will you 'scuse me, Benny?"

"Oh, yes," replied Benny; "an' I'll run 'long home now. I'll come soon again an' play with you, if you won't mind," he added, as he ran down to the gate.

Gracie called back again that "she would be happy to see him," quite in a grown-up little way, that impressed Benny with the idea that she was a very superior sort of little lady, who did him great honor in being willing to play with him.

Gracie ran upstairs and found her little trunk awaiting her. She took the key out of her pocket and opened the trunk, and then she and Auntie took out the small, pretty dresses and hung them up in the closet, and laid the dainty underclothing in the bureau drawers where Auntie had sprinkled sweet dried lavender.

Presently she came across a little box, which she held in her hand, and, putting both hands behind her back, she laughed merrily.

"Guess which hand has got a be-yewtiful thing for you in it, Auntie Grace."

"Well, it's the right or the left hand," laughingly replied Auntie. "I'll guess both, so as to be sure and get the present."

"Once more!" cried Gracie, and in the excitement she wiggled about so that Auntie saw very plainly the little hand which closed over the box, and so the little niece produced it.

"I'll open it for you," she said, and presently she was holding up a pretty golden chain and locket. The locket held Mamma's sweet face, and Gracie looked lovingly at it.

"Dear, precious Mamma!" she said. "Oh, I do wish I could just kiss her a little minute!"

"Well, when am I going to look at my gift, all by myself, I wonder!" laughed Auntie.

"Oh, yes, I forgot. It's yours, 'cause Mamma sent it to you for your birthday next week, and—and my present to you, Auntie, is my *visit* to you, you see."

"And the best present in the world, too; just as welcome as Mamma's face in the locket with the beautiful chain!" exclaimed Auntie, hugging her little namesake closely.

Then the dinner bell was heard—or rather not a bell, but a row of Chinese musical gongs, upon which the servant beat gently with a padded stick, and produced very sweet, bell-like music.

"Oh, what's that?" asked Gracie delightedly, for she

loved music. "May I be the gong-girl while I'm here?" she asked, after they had gone downstairs, and she had seen the pretty string of gongs, and had played upon them quite correctly.

"No doubt Ann will let you take her place," replied Auntie, smiling; and I need hardly tell you that all through her little visit to Auntie, Gracie held her proud position as "gong-girl," and, consequently, no amount of play could induce her to be late at her meals, which perhaps was a very good thing.

After dinner—which Gracie enjoyed very much, because Auntie had so many things Gracie liked to eat—she and Auntie and Angelina took a little walk, and the afternoon passed quickly till supper time called Gracie to her gong duties again, and after that she had a little comfort-talk with dear Auntie out on the porch in the soft twilight. Then the bed hour and Auntie's good-night kiss, and then—oh, there would come the long, restful sleep in the dainty little bed prepared for her—and afterward the awaking in the shine of a new, happy day, while the birdies were singing their morning songs!

CHAPTER VII.

GRACIE MAKES A NEW FRIEND.

WO or three days after this, Benny—who had been impatient to get down to Auntie's cottage again the very next day after his introduction to Gracie, but had not been allowed by his grandmother to do so, for fear he might be considered intrusive and troublesome by Miss Grey—at last received permission to go, and started off very happily with Fido. He had been quite a busy boy during those two or three days, and had found chances to do several errands here and there, and earned money to put in the little tin Bank on the kitchen mantel. He was always delighted when he could drop into that little Bank some small amount, which his own efforts had earned, to help his dear old granny a little. So he felt very light of heart as he started off with Fido for an hour or so of play with his new friend.

Fido ran after the squirrels, and barked at the birds and the butterflies, without the slightest intention of scaring them, of course, but simply because he felt quite as happy as his young master, and not being able to whistle, as Benny was doing, he gave vent to his joy in his own doggish fashion, though it must be confessed that the

squirrels and the birds and yellow-winged butterflies didn't appreciate his light-hearted way one bit.

"Now, Fido, stop it right away!" at last said Benny, whose tender little heart couldn't bear to see the havoc Fido was causing. "Stop being cruel, and act like the gentlemanly dog I've tried to teach you to be."

Fido drooped his tail, and glanced sideways at Ben in a shamed way.

"You're going to show off some tricks to Miss Gracie, sir, and if you don't do your best I'll be 'shamed of you," continued Ben. "Here now! sit up, and beg my pardon for chasing poor little things smaller 'n you are, and they can't even chase you back again, either. Up, now! and beg pardon, sir!"

Fido wagged his tail, and then, sitting on his little haunches, raised his fore paws to Benny in a very cunning way, which made the little boy laugh. The moment Fido saw the smile, down he came on all four little legs again, and away he went over the road, as happy as could be; and, with Ben running after him, it wasn't long before they reached Gracie's house, and found the little girl swinging away under the trees and singing like a little human bird.

"Hello, Gracie!" called Ben, and "Hello!" called Gracie in return, as she slipped out of the swing and met Benny at the gate.

They had a merry afternoon of it, you may be sure; and Blackie rode just like a real circus cat on Fido's shaggy back—when she wasn't slipping off of it. I

don't believe Fido especially enjoyed having Pussie's claws sticking into him, as she tried to keep herself from falling; but he was a good little dog, and remembered his training, and he was rewarded by a piece of cake

afterward, while Pussie had her reward in a saucer of cream.

Then Gracie and Benny and Fido played at hide and seek, and Fido never failed to find the children and drag them out with his teeth—very carefully, so as neither to hurt nor tear—from their hiding places. Then Benny made Fido jump over a stick, and through the circle he made with his arms,



“Up, now!” Page 38.

and through a barrel hoop he found in the barn. And he showed Gracie how Fido always begged pardon when he had been naughty, and the poor little doggie wondered what new, naughty things he had done, that he was kept begging pardon so much.

Then they tried to make Blackie turn “cart wheels,” as Benny could, and as he had tried to teach his dog to do,

only Fido for once in his life rebelled at the trick. But Blackie, very wisely, refused to be taught such nonsense, and after she had scratched Gracie twice, and arched her back and hissed at Benny angrily, the children let her alone and went off in search of better fun.

Meanwhile the dinner hour was approaching, and Ann looked for the little "gong-girl." I have told you, I think, that Gracie—owing to that Chinese gong arrangement—was not late at the meal hours during her visit; but I must make this one exception, after all, for on this occasion she could not be found, and Ann called and looked in vain.

"Why, she was here a few moments ago," said Auntie. "I don't think she can be far away."

But Gracie was not as near as her Auntie fancied, and as dinner could not very well be postponed, according to Cook's notion, it chanced that when the little girl came hurrying in a little later she was ashamed to see Auntie sitting all alone at the dinner table, and almost ready for her dessert.

"Oh, Auntie!" cried Gracie, her face flushed and warm, and her little voice choked with eagerness, "I truly forgot 'bout dinner time, and—and—I never remembered I had to beat the gong for Ann, and I'm dreadf'ly 'shamed and sorry." But Auntie said,

"Never mind, dear. Sit down and tell me all about it"—for she knew her small niece had news to tell.

"Well," began Gracie, "you see it was time for Benny to be going, he said; and I said I'd go a little way

with him. I had Angelina with me, 'cause we'd been playing keep house up in the hay, you know, and I didn't like to leave her all 'lone by herself; so we went part way with Benny, and just when I was going to come back, you know, Auntie, Benny, he said his gran'ma had some lovely calico that would make Angelina a new dress, and if I'd just go on to the cottage she'd give it to me. Well, you know I'd never been there, and was most 'fraid to go, but Benny coaxed dreadf'ly hard, so I went—'cause, you see, I never once thought 'bout dinner time. Well—just as we got to Benny's house, we heard someone say quick, as though there was being some kind of a scare going on: 'Oh, chicky! shoo! shoo!' and Benny said, 'Oh, that's Sally Smith! What's she doin', I wonder, in the kitchen!' and he ran fast as he could to the kitchen door, and there was a little girl driving a big chicken off the stove. Benny said it was his lame quail, and it had got out of its basket and flew right on the stove, where gran'ma had been getting dinner ready; and it was hot as could be on top where the quail was. And, you see, that little girl lives pretty near Benny's house, and she had come to speak to his gran'ma 'bout something, and gran'ma wasn't in the kitchen, but the quail was, and its little feet would have been burned if Sally hadn't shooed him off quick."

Auntie seemed much interested in Gracie's story, and of course, as the little girl was eating and telling her tale at the same time, it took a little longer to tell than it takes you, little reader, to read about it; and Gracie

was quite through with her recital when Ann brought in the dessert at last, so she went on in her eager lit-



“ ‘ Oh, chicky ! shoo ! shoo ! ’ ” Page 41.

tle voice : “ Well, when the quail had flapped down on the floor, and Benny had put it back in the basket and shut the cover on,—it had plenty of air, you see, ’cause the cover had holes in it,—he came back and said, ‘ Gracie, this is Sally Smith, an’ she lives near here. Sally, this is my new friend Gracie, an’ she’s come to visit her Auntie, Miss Grey, up the road; you know the place.’ And then Sally shook hands

with me and said ‘ How do you do,’ and I said ‘ I am well, thank you,’ and—and—oh, then Benny said his gran’ma had gone to the spring down the hill for

water, and I said I guessed I'd come some other time, 'cause I had to hurry home; and so I hurried fast as I could, and I kept thinking 'bout that little girl all the way, for, Auntie, I know she's a nice girl, and I liked her 'cause Benny *whispered* to me afterward that she had lots of hard work to do at her house, and she hadn't any nice things to play with, and hadn't the least mite of a dolly, either. Oh! I don't see how any little girl can get along without a dolly to love, do you?"

Then Auntie Grace explained that little Sally was living with a sick mother, and they were so poor that the neighbors around the village helped take care of them, and had given clothing to them, and kept Sally in nice order, and provided medicines for the sick mother; and that little brave Sally—though only one year older than Gracie—was obliged to take care of the house and do the work necessary, and care for and watch over her mother, and had very little time for play. "She's a very nice girl, dear, and you will like to be kind to Sally whenever you can, I'm sure," said Auntie Grace, as they finished dinner and went out on the piazza presently.

"Now I know *two* new children, Auntie," said Gracie, "and I'm having a be-yewtiful time visiting you!" She put Miss Angelina in a chair, and climbed up in Auntie's lap, and, after they had talked a little longer, Gracie's head began to nod, and the first thing Auntie knew next was that she was holding in her arms a sound asleep little niece; and, rather than waken her, Auntie Grace sat still

for some time, and, I must confess, before Gracie awoke, Auntie had a pair of very tired arms indeed. But do you think she minded that? Oh, no! she was too glad to have a dear little golden-haired niece to hold, to even realize that she was tired, and if company had not called at last, I don't know how long Gracie would have gone on dreaming under the green vines that shaded the porch.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD GENTLEMAN.

NE day when Auntie Grace had some errands in the village, she took Gracie with her in the phaeton, and, as they were driving along, they saw, a little distance off, the figure of an elderly man approaching.

He paused presently in the shade of some tall bushes, and Gracie said :

“ Why, Auntie, that’s the nice, kind old man I met in the cars. Can’t I speak to him as we pass ? ”

“ Certainly, dearie,” replied Auntie. “ But he may not see us, for he seems to be deep in thought, and he stands quite far back from the road, you see.”

But as the pony trotted along, his hoofs making music on the hard ground, the old gentleman lifted his eyes, and a smile flew into them at once.

“ Why, how do you do, little maid ? ” he said, lifting his cap to Miss Grey. “ I was just this minute thinking of you, and wondering how my small traveling companion was getting along now-a-days. I was taking a little walk down your way, to see if I could chance to see you.”

Gracie beamed all over her little face, and replied, as she laid her hand on Auntie’s arm :

“ Oh, I’m very glad to see you again, sir, and this is my dear Auntie Grace Grey. You know I told you about



Auntie in the cars, but I didn’t know your name, so I told her about you *without* any name.”

He laughed, and said : “ Let me introduce myself, then. My name is John Howe, and I am delighted to meet the auntie of my dear little friend here.”

“ I think, sir,” replied Auntie Grace, “ that we have mutual acquaintances in a Mr. and Mrs. Tenny who live a few miles beyond our village. Your name has been mentioned to me by them, and I am very glad to have met you. And do let me thank you now for your kindness to Gracie during the journey from New York. She appreciated it very much.”

“ Well, now, if I lightened her journey any, I’m sure I’m glad to know it,” said the old gentleman, “ and I’m going to ask her to do me the favor to

“ He paused presently in the shade of some tall bushes.” Page 45.

come and see me some day, when you can spare her. I’ve a big barn, and it is such a nice place for a lot of

children to play in, that I'm going to ask one or two little people I meet now and then out my way to come and have a romp in it. May Gracie join them some nice day, if I let her know when?"

"Indeed she may, Mr. Howe," was Auntie's answer, while Gracie's dimples kept growing, one after the other, for delight.

"Well, then," the old man said, "I'll send her a note; and now good-by! I won't hinder you any longer." He raised his hat again, and, with good-bys from Auntie and Gracie, the gentleman walked on, and the pony trotted along to make up for lost time.

The errands detained Auntie quite a long time in the village, and it was close upon twilight when the pony's head was turned homeward at last. The drive was a beautiful one. Broad, green meadows stretched away here and there, with a background of hills, down which the shadows of the closing day were creeping softly. Farm-houses nestled under great spreading trees, and pretty brooks ran, singing their own merry songs, along the roadside, till they wandered away into the woody ways, where the shadows were deeper and the birds were getting ready for their good-night lullabies.

At one place on their homeward way Auntie and Gracie passed a cool, shady lane, leading out of some woods and toward a pretty farm-house.

Down the lane came a drove of sheep, and a young woman walked beside them. Helping her in his faithful way was the sheep-dog. He kept his eyes wide open

and his ears pricked up, ready to catch the slightest sign of danger to his mistress and her flock.

Gracie thought it was a beautiful sight to see those pretty sheep coming so eagerly home from the pasture—



"Home from the pasture."

where they had played and roamed about all day—to the safe fold where nothing could harm them, and where they could rest in peace throughout the night.

"There's a little sermon for you and for me, Gracie," said Auntie, smiling, as she saw the little girl watching the scene with great interest and pleasure, "a dear little sermon right here on the spot, and I wonder if you guess what it is?"

Gracie pondered a moment; then she remembered the lambs she had seen playing in the meadow beside the station, as she had looked from the train window on her way to visit Auntie, and the little rhyme about little lambs, and Jesus as the tender shepherd; so she replied:

"I guess the sermon is about Jesus loving little lambs; and, of course, if he loves the little lambs, he must love the sheep, too, 'cause they are the mothers of the lambs."

"Well," said Auntie, "that is right so far as it goes; but there's more than that in the sermon I read, as I see this picture nature has given us. I'll tell you, Gracie, what I mean. We are all of us—all human beings, I mean—just like sheep let out to roam about the pastures. Some of us are heedless, and go wandering away from the right path, and beyond the Shepherd's wise provision for our comfort. We think *we* know better than the dear Master who owns us, what is best and more comfortable for us. But we find pretty soon that we do not, and we get into trouble; and, after finding that we can't make ourselves feel any better by our own efforts alone, we begin to long for the Shepherd, and to realize that only *He* can help us, and so we begin to look for Him,—and all the while He is looking for us, you know,—and when we call for Him with all our

hearts, whether we are little lambs or grown sheep, He surely hears us, and if we listen in earnest we can hear His loving voice, and be able to follow Him straight to the fold, and where we feel safe and happy at once. Now, isn't that a real little sermon those sheep have been preaching to you and me?"

"Well, Auntie Grace, I never shall—I'm sure I never shall—forget it," said Gracie. "I sing a little song in Sunday-school at home that begins, 'Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me, bless Thy little lamb to-night'; but somehow it never seemed so like a *real* thing as it will after this, 'cause, you see, Auntie, I can see this real picture all the time in my memory, and so I can't forget one bit of the little sermon you've told me."

They drove on a little faster now, for the shadows were growing and growing, and Ann would be waiting supper and wondering where her people had gone to.

When they at last reached home, Ann told them that Benny had been there to say that his granny had found the pieces of pretty calico she had promised for doll Angelina, and he didn't bring them down, for the reason that Gracie might like to go and see if she liked them.

Gracie laughed. "I'm most sure, Auntie, that Benny Brown just wanted to make an excuse for me to go there; don't you s'pose so, too? But I'd go there without getting any calico, 'cause I like Benny so much, and Sally's a real nice girl, too."

"Well, *I'll* go and see Granny Brown soon, and, if you like, we'll go together; or would you rather not wait for me?" said Auntie.

"Oh, I'd rather wait for my dear, sweet Auntie!" cried Gracie, standing on tiptoe to draw Auntie's face down to hers for a loving kiss.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INVITATION.

“ ‘Oh, dolly! my dolly, my beautiful dolly!
We’re having a visit so nice and so jolly!’ ”

O sang Gracie one morning, a day or two later, as she and Angelina sat in the hammock on the shady corner of the piazza. She felt quite elated at the composition of her rhyme and the music she set it to, and, after repeating it a few times, decided to add two more lines and a little more variety to the tune. So she began: “ ‘I’m glad that we came to my Auntie’s house,’ and—and—and I’m glad that—oh, dear me! I don’t see what ’ll go with ‘*house*’! ‘I’m glad that I came to my Auntie’s house,’ and I’m glad—oh, I know what ’ll do! This is it: ‘I’m glad you’re behaving as good as a *mouse*!’ There, that’s just the rhyme I wanted!” So she touched her little foot to the floor, and started the hammock with a good push, and began her song again:

“ ‘Oh, dolly! my dolly, my beautiful dolly!
We’re having a visit so nice and so jolly!
I’m glad that we came to my Auntie’s house,
And I’m glad you’re behaving as good as a mouse.’ ”

While she sang away happily, doll Angelina took an

attitude which caused her eyes to close, and Gracie, perceiving that fact, slipped out of the hammock, and, in a motherly way, laid her daughter down on the hammock cushion, and left her sleeping as sweetly as dolls generally do. Then she decided to run out in the meadow just back of the house for a little visit to the bees and butterflies. Dear little Gracie! how she did love that meadow, with its soft, green carpet, and its nodding daisies, and the bright-winged visitors which flew about from blossom to blossom, and seemed to be playing at hide and seek all the time!

She finally made a little nest for herself amidst the tall grasses, and snuggled down to rest. She was wishing Benny would happen along, and wondering how soon Auntie would make her visit to old Mrs. Brown, when she heard her name called, and recognized that dear Auntie's sweet voice.

Jumping up from her fragrant nest in the meadow, she hastened to the house, and there was Auntie on the porch.

"Well, darling, what do you say to this?" She held in her hand a note just received, addressed to her, with a postscript to Gracie. "It is from your kind old gentleman, dear," continued Auntie, "and this is what he says." She began to read, as follows:

" 'DEAR MISS GREY:

" 'If you are willing, I should like to have Gracie come out to my barn party on Wednesday, day after

to-morrow. As I am not yet acquainted with many little people about here, I hope Gracie will help me out in numbers by asking as many of her young friends as can join her. Trusting that this will meet with your approval, I remain, dear madam,

“ ‘ Very truly yours,

“ ‘ JOHN HOWE.

“ ‘ P. S.—TO LITTLE GRACIE:

“ ‘ My dear little girl, please ask any of your young companions whom you would like to have at my party,

and be sure that they will, each and all, find a welcome from your old friend and his big barn.’ ”



The nest in the meadow. Page 53.

“ ‘ Why, Auntie Gracie Grey! isn't it splendid? ” exclaimed Gracie, clapping her hands. “ ‘ Of course I must take Benny, and—oh, Auntie! do

you think I might ask Sally, too? You see, I don't know anyone else here, and, anyway, Sally is so sad and tired

all the time, don't you think she'd like to have a little fun in the big barn?"

"Certainly, dear, I do think so; and we will go this very afternoon and give both children the invitation."

That suited Gracie exactly, and, as the dinner was ready to be served just then, Gracie hurried to her duty as "gong-girl," and pretty soon the business of eating and drinking at Auntie's dainty table was well under way. Auntie drank to Gracie's health and the success of the barn party in a glass of clear, fresh well-water, which she laughingly called "*Adam's ale*," because it was the only kind of "ale" Adam—the first man—ever had to drink, and no better kind has ever been found on earth since.

Gracie drank to Auntie's health in her glass of rich, creamy milk, and wished all sorts of beautiful and glad things for her; and they had such a delicious piece of roast beef, and such snowy mashed potatoes, and such crisp, sweet lettuce, and such dainty little side dishes, and finally, to "top off," such foamy, floating, whipped cream with raspberry jelly quivering all over it like little islands, that it was no wonder Gracie's appetite was almost too great for her small size. I've almost made *myself* hungry by describing the cosy little meal, and so I'll pass on to the afternoon.

CHAPTER X.

OFF TO SEE GRANNY.

T was in the cool, pleasant part of the afternoon when Auntie and Gracie set forth on their walk through the wooded lane toward Benny's little home.

Granny sat in her rocking chair in the neat little room which served as the dining and sitting room, as well as the kitchen, for the little home was so small and so cosy that it only possessed three rooms and the woodshed. But oh, how neat and clean those three rooms always were! and as for the woodshed, why, Auntie Grace's at home wasn't kept in better order; for was it not Benny's special pride? and the only place where he could do—as he said—*his* housekeeping?

Granny sat knitting and thinking, while the kettle sang its song.

I think the kettle's song must have been something like this,—I mean the *words* of its song,—if they could have made themselves clear on the spot:

“ Oh, I'm the friend of the rich and poor,
And a happy old thing am I!
The hotter the fire, the louder I sing,
While my steam is rising high.



“Granny sat knitting and thinking, while the kettle sang.” Page 56.

“Whether I’m black, or whether I shine,
It matters not to a heart like mine ;
For I’m the friend of the lovers of tea,
And what in the world could they do without me?”

I cannot, of course, tell you what Granny was thinking about, but no doubt her thoughts were traveling away back along the years past and gone, and perhaps she was living over—as old people have a comforting way of doing—her “little girl days,” when she, like Benny, had a dear grandma to make happy, and wait upon, and love dearly, as little Benny did now for her. Perhaps she was thinking, too, of what a great and precious comfort the little grandson was to her. If little people only knew what real little blessings and comforts they can be to old people at all times, whether rich or poor, if they tried to be, and if they only knew how grandmamas appreciate and welcome those expressions of love and thoughtfulness on the part of their little people, what a big pile of happiness would grow in every heart that has begun to beat more feebly as the passing years have taken strength from the tired old body. I do not like to see children act rudely and carelessly toward elderly or old people, and when they do so they are never quite happy in their hearts afterward.

But I am preaching a little sermon right in the midst of my story, and I’m sure I didn’t intend that, so we will go back to Granny. While she sat knitting away so restfully, Auntie and Gracie came to the door and knocked, and at Granny’s cheery “Come in!” they

entered. Of course they received a hearty welcome, and Gracie asked where Benny was, for, not seeing him about, she felt that she must hunt him up at once and give him the all-important invitation. She told Granny all about it, and the old woman was pleased, of course, for every good time that could chance along Benny's way.

"Bless your heart, dearie," she said, "it 'll be a grand good frolic for the child. Ben's a good boy, and he deserves good times, though it isn't often he gets a real holiday treat such as yours will be. The boy is somewhere around, for I heard him whistling a few moments ago. Like as not he's in the wood-lot yonder."

"I'll find him, Granny dear, never you fear, for I'll call as loud as ever I can; and oh, won't he be glad when he hears about the barn party!"

"When you come back, dearie, I'll give you the pieces of calico I found for your dolly. Now don't let me forget it."

Sure enough, Benny was found in the woods, and at that moment he was playing with a toad, which had no more fear of him than if he had been one of its intimate friends. Benny never hurt any living creature. The birds never feared him; on the contrary, they liked him, because he liked to scatter crumbs for them. The animals, wherever he met them, never thought of being afraid of a stick or a stone; and the insects he came across were as safe in his path as though no living person were near them.

The little toad he was talking to sat on its little hind legs as complacently and as confidently as though it were "plenty large enough to fight Benny if it had wanted to," as Gracie described it afterward to Auntie. It blinked its eyes wisely as Benny talked to it, and seemed to understand that he was saying kind words and caressing things to its homely little self. "Hello, Gracie!" cried Ben, as the little girl ran merrily toward him. "This is a jolly nice toad; see! I can tickle him, and he thinks it's fun." He knelt down and gently tickled the toad on its breast with a small twig. Toady swelled up, and "looked pleasant," so Benny declared, but Gracie drew away from it, and called it "a horrid thing!"

"No, it isn't a horrid thing!" contradicted Benny. "I don't call it horrid just 'cause it's homely. I feel sorry for toads, 'cause everybody's down on 'em; and they ain't pretty, that's a fact. But God made 'em, same's He made us; and Granny says they, and all sorts of bugs and things, no matter how horrid they look, are God's things, and we ain't got the leastest bit of right to hurt 'em and plague 'em, 'specially 'cause they can't fight us back."

"*Some* things can fight us back," argued Gracie; "for there are big things that bite and kick, and I guess you couldn't hurt them if you dared. I've seen pictures of great big animals, that are God's animals, just the same as bugs are, and they'd scare and hurt us, 'stead of our scaring them, you better believe."

"Yes, I know; but Granny says all animals should be

treated kindly, no matter how big they are—and the big ones forget to be cross and scary if folks treat 'em well. Anyway, toads can't hurt you, and you can tickle this one if you want to. Try it?"

Gracie decided to do so, and presently the toad was in a blissful condition again. "I always hated 'em before," said Gracie, after the toad had been allowed to hop under some vines and look out for himself at last, "but I'm always going to think they're nice, after this, and I'll never—no, never—throw any more stones at 'em, as I did yesterday in the garden."

"Why, Gracie Moore!" exclaimed Benny in grieved surprise. "Would you throw stones at anything that ain't got any arms to throw stones back at you? Oh! that's a mean trick. It's mean to shy stones, anyway, even at people, 'cause it's like fighting, Granny says, and I don't b'lieve you really would."

Gracie looked a little ashamed. "Well, I haven't ever thrown 'em at people, but I guess I have at cats and things sometimes. But I won't any more. Now, I've got a lovely thing to tell you"—and she delivered her barn-frolic message, greatly to Benny's delight.

She told him she wanted Sally, too, and he thought it would be a splendid treat for her, and he knew she had *one* real nice dress to wear, and would look as well as any of the little girls, "except Gracie herself." Then he finished gathering the little twigs and sticks for fuel, for which he had come to the woods, and, Gracie helping him, his little hand-wagon was soon filled.

Then they returned to the cottage, and Granny Brown gave Gracie the pretty bits of calico she thought could be used for Angelina's gowns, and a piece of very old-fashioned silk, a part of an "auld lang syne" work bag, which no doubt Angelina would enjoy for a "best dress." Gracie thanked Granny with a kiss, and then she and Auntie went over to Sally's house and made her a very happy little girl with the invitation to the barn frolic. "But s'pose mamma isn't well enough to let me go?" asked Sally, with a sudden feeling that it would be selfish to leave her sick mother and go off for her own pleasure.

Auntie smiled. "Well, dear, if that should happen, I will let Ann come and sit with your mother the whole afternoon; and as Granny has also volunteered to come over and see her too, I'm sure you need not be at all afraid to enjoy yourself."

Sally's mother was as glad as Sally herself at the holiday anticipations, and said she had felt so much better lately, she was sure it would not be necessary for Sally to feel anxious.

So presently Auntie and Gracie were wending their way home again, the little girl hopping and skipping along under the trees with Ben (who was going part way with them, and then to the pasture lot to drive home a neighbor's cow for him), and both small tongues as full of chatter as little tongues usually are.

After they reached home Aunt Grace sent a note to the old gentleman and accepted his kind invitation in the name of the three children, with their delighted thanks.

CHAPTER XI.

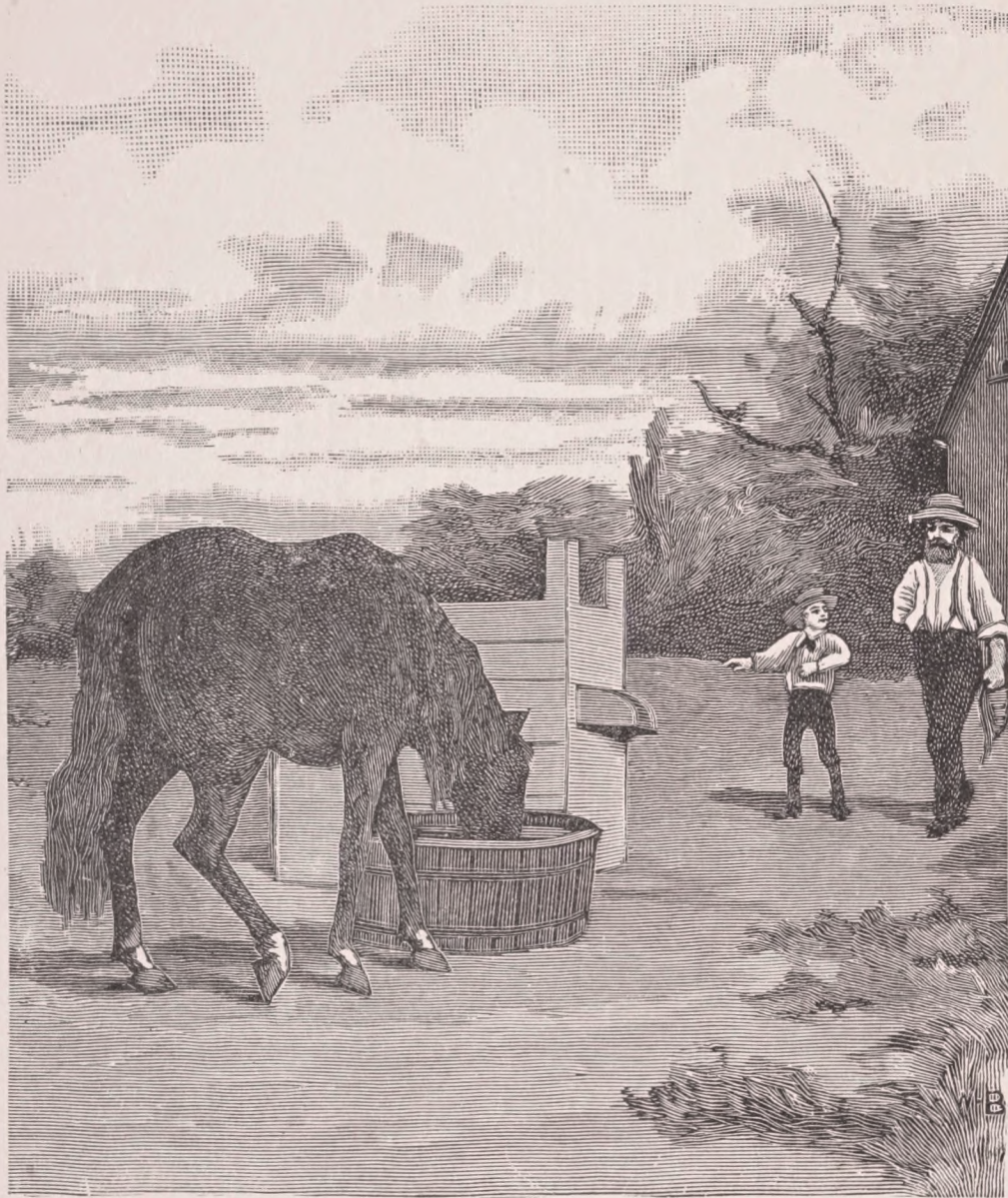
THE BARN FROLIC.

HE afternoon of the anticipated day came at last, and it seemed as though the sun was doing its best to shine as it had never shone before. The very moment Benny and Sally had finished their dinners, and set things in order according to their usual duties, they hurried with happy hearts and eager feet toward the "Grey cottage," for there they were to meet Gracie, and all were to be driven, by the man who did barn chores for Aunt Grace, to the old gentleman's place. Sally brought word to Miss Grey that Ann would not be required, after all, to go to her mamma, as she was feeling much stronger that day; and, besides, Granny was going right over there. So she (Sally) was ready to have as jolly a time as possible, and with no anxiety about her dear mamma.

John, the man, was just going for Dobbin, who was having a refreshing drink in the barnyard. "Oh, let me help harness up!" cried Ben, starting off on the run. "May I lead him to the barn, John?"

"All right! Go ahead, sonny, an' make yourself useful as well as ornamental in that there spick and span suit you're wearin' to-day. I'll wager a hot cookey old Dob-

bin 'd ruther stay ter home in peace than trot you passel o' youngsters to a frolic in hay he can't get a bite of, let alone rollin' and kickin' in it, as you folks will."



"“Oh, let me help harness up!”” Page 63.

Benny wasn't sure whether John was being cross, or only joking, but when he saw the twinkles in the man's eyes he knew there was no "scolding" about it; and when John presently added, "Bless ye, my boy! but what wouldn't I give to be again a shaver like you,

an' bound for a barn frolic such as is ahead of you!—I used to pitch inter them things like a good un, I can tell you!"—why, Ben actually wished some fairy would come along and turn John's years back till he became once more a boy.

Dobbin finished his drink, and followed Benny obe-

diently to the barn, though I dare say he didn't feel much like being put before the wagon.

Auntie Grace decided that it would be wiser to send Ann with the children, and she confided to Ann that if the little niece, who was not used to barn-romps and rough frolics of that sort, managed to escape the prongs of a pitchfork, and a fall from some high beam, and returned with a whole little body, she should really feel like drawing a long breath of relief, and didn't believe she could do so until then.

However, the event went off beautifully, and there were about a dozen little folks there in the old, roomy, sweet-scented barn, to which Benny, as the "gentleman" of his especial party, proudly led the way.

They had a grand, good time, and climbed the hay-lofts, one after the other, Gracie being as venturesome as the rest, with whom she very speedily got acquainted. The boys climbed even the high beams above the lofts, and let themselves tumble with yells—on purpose to "scare the girls"—down to the fragrant masses of hay beneath, and they rolled the girls around in the hay like balls, until once Gracie fell off the loft down into a great heap of soft hay on the floor and pulled Sally after her, both laughing till they were too weak to stand up and try another climb, till some of the boys helped them.

The hens, which had been pecking grain about the floor, had not tarried in the barn, you may be sure, any longer than necessary, after it was invaded by the children, and one or two sly hens, which had been laying

eggs in their hidden nests way in the darkest corner of the hayloft, thought no more of their eggs, but flew, with loud cackles and frightened squawks, from the loft to the barn floor, and, with fluttering wings, disappeared as soon as possible through the open doors into the sunshine and peace of the scenes outside.

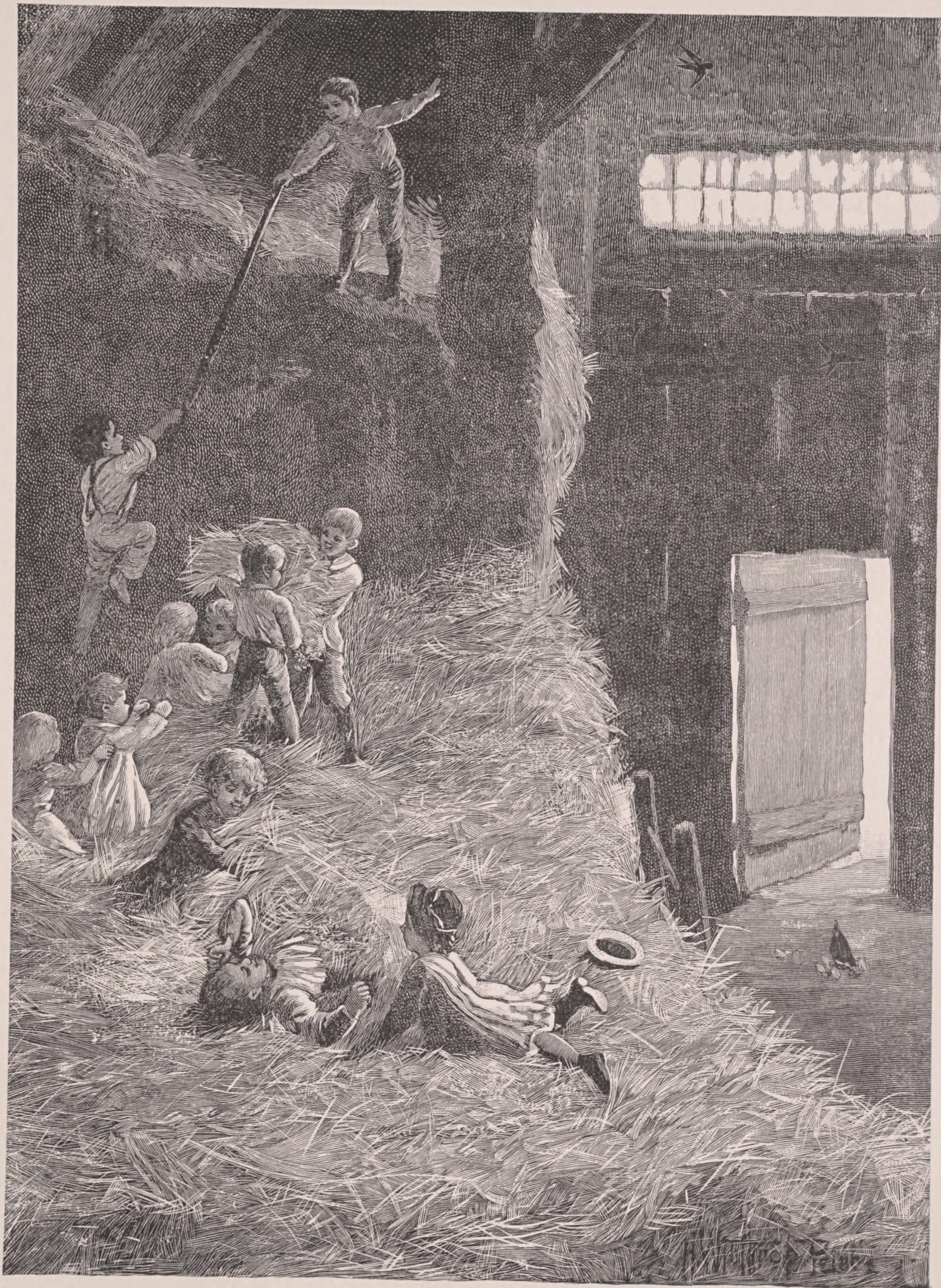
Everything went smoothly during the good time there in the old barn; not a cross word was spoken, nor any unkindness shown on the part of any of the children. Sunny hearts, sunny eyes, merry voices, and fun—oh, lots and lots of fun!

The funniest thing—and yet it wasn't very pleasant "fun," after all, though it made the children laugh so heartily, and even the little victim himself—happened to the smallest boy in the group, and that was when he tumbled, face down, upon a nest of eggs, nobody had seen, hidden deeply in the hay, and, when he arose, his poor little face was covered with the contents of the smashed eggs, and he looked like a yellow-masked little chappie. Of course the others laughed—how could they help it?—and of course he laughed himself, because he was too happy a boy in his heart to mind the accident.

But Sally made a wisp of hay do duty as a towel, and then went to the kitchen with him, where a basin of water and soap, and a soft towel, made him presentable again.

That was really the only accident which happened, and, as I say, such a comical one that nobody cared.

Well—after a nice, long time of play, and when the little people were beginning to get pretty warm and



The Barn Frolic. Page 63.

tired, and ready for a rest, Mr. Howe appeared, and rang a little bell.

"Hello!" cried Benny. "What's that? I hope, sir, it doesn't mean the fun is over!" He peeped down from the hayloft at Mr. Howe, who rang his bell merrily and laughed, as Benny asked his question so anxiously.

"Ting-a-ling-ling-ling!" said the bell in its silvery tones; and, one by one, the little folks scrambled down from the loft, and, with wisps of hay and straw sticking in their tousled little heads, and clinging to their clothing, they went very reluctantly to the wide open door.

"Now, you youngsters, come with me!" said Mr. Howe, and he led the way to a large tree on a plot of grass, where the children found a table spread with refreshments most liked by their kind.

"Now, then, go ahead and eat your fill!" Mr. Howe commanded, laughingly; and, with loud and merry hurrahs and cheers for their good old friend, the children gathered about the table, while Mr. Howe sat down on his favorite bench under a tree, a short distance away, and watched his little guests, with a heart as happy and young in feeling as theirs. His old servant waited upon them, and it gave her as much pleasure as her master felt, for she "dearly loved the little dears," and regretted she was not living in a house overflowing with them. She made them eat their fill, and at last they were satisfied, and the good things remaining held no more temptation for their healthy appetites. Then they filed into the house and washed sticky little mouths and

fingers, before going back for a last good frolic in the roomy old barn.

But one of their number did not go with them, though they did not miss the little absent one until her sister cried presently, "Why, where can Baby May be? She isn't here!" and back to the house she ran again, calling, "May! Baby May!" at the top of her voice. But the old servant stood at the door and held up a warning finger.

"'Sh! don't make a noise! Come and see!"

Well, there was the little one sound asleep in the large kitchen rocker. She had picked a kitten up in her arms, and climbed into the chair with it, and, being tired and sleepy, dear little mite, with her play, the very moment her small drowsy head touched the pillow behind her, that very moment, of course, she went floating away into dreamland, and, being in a corner of the large room, the eager children, hurrying back to their play, failed to see her, and so she slept on in sweetest rest, while the old servant moved carefully about at her duties, so as not to waken her. "She's tired! so tired, poor baby!" murmured the woman; and, going to the doorway to beckon her master in to see the pretty picture, was in time to keep the older girl from disturbing the little one's slumber.

Kitty-cat was sound asleep, too, and they slept on during the next half-hour, while the other children finished their barn games, and it was at last time to go home.

Then there was another surprise for the little people;

for Mr. Howe had told John and Ann that they needn't return for their three passengers, and he had also told the parents of the others that he would return them in



“ ‘Tired, so tired, poor baby!’ ” Page 69.

safety himself. Consequently, the children were wildly delighted to find a “*straw ride*” ahead for them, when they were ready to go. The large farm wagon was piled with hay, and a pair of sleek horses were ready to draw the merry load of passengers.

Tom, the colored man, sat perched on his high front seat. “Now, Tom,” said Mr. Howe, “if you drive Miss Grey’s little people

home first, it will give these other small folks who live so near a chance for a longer ride, you know, and I’m sure they’ll be glad of that.”

“Three cheers for Mr. Howe!” shouted the children. “*He* knows what we like! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!”

Tom grinned till he exposed nearly every white tooth in his woolly head, and gathered up the reins for the final start.

“Marse Howe, he sut’nly know how to please chillum,” he said to himself. “He sure am de boss man for good times,” and away went the hay wagon rattling down the road, while the children waved their good-bys, and many thanks to the kindhearted old man who loved little folks so well.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN.

AUNTIE GRACE had been to the gate several times to watch for the return of her young folks, and was just beginning to wonder why they were so long in coming, when she heard the sound of wheels at last, and also the music of childish laughter, and presently the hay wagon came along.

“Oh, we’ve had the be-yewfullest time!” shouted Benny, leaping from the wagon before it had fairly stopped, and Gracie’s little tongue began to wag as fast as his, as she was put on her feet again, and ran to meet Auntie. Sally followed, with an eager question concerning her mother.

“Is it all right with mamma, Miss Grey?” she asked anxiously; and when she was told that Ann had been over there a while ago to see how things were going, and had found the invalid mother in good spirits, the little girl, much relieved in her mind, was quite as ready to chatter away about her good time as were her little friends.

Auntie was told every scrap of news, even to the details of the refreshments they had enjoyed, and of the little fellow who had tumbled, face down, upon the nest

of eggs, and of the tired baby who had gone to sleep with kitty in the kitchen chair, and much more that was interesting to Auntie, because her little ones were so happy in telling it all.

Then Benny and Sally bade her and Gracie good-night, and scampered home as fast as their feet could carry them.

"Poor little Sally!" said Auntie, as she looked after them and saw how Sally's hurrying feet were out-speeding Benny's, because she was so eager to reach the waiting mother again. "Poor little Sally! I am glad she has had one good long afternoon of a good time. She's a brave and patient little thing, and her mother told me that she couldn't remember when Sally had ever given her a moment of sorrow or of disobedience in all her young years. That is a fine record, isn't it, dearie?"

Gracie drew a long breath. "Oh, Auntie, if only *my* mamma could say that! But I've been such a naughty girl sometimes! You can't guess how naughty I do feel often and often, and it does seem as though I can't be sorry enough afterward."

Auntie drew her small niece close to her heart, and kissed the sweet little face. "We are all more apt to do wrong than right, my darling, but God sees down into our hearts, and knows when we are sorry, and helps us, if we ask Him, you know, Gracie—helps us to do better and better as the days go on, so we won't be discouraged, dear little heart. You have been the

means of giving both Ben and Sally a grand good time to-day, and doesn't that make you happy?"

Gracie laid her head on Auntie's shoulder, and said she felt very happy indeed.

"Why, what do you think Granny Brown told me the other day, after you had gone to find Benny? We were speaking of Sally, and I was hoping that nothing would hinder her from going to the barn party, and Granny said that one day, when she went over to Sally's house on an errand, she heard a little voice coming from behind a pile of wood beside the door, and she listened a moment, and found that it was little Sally asking God to please let her have a real good time *some* day, and now and then besides; and she promised that she would try and be a good girl, and work hard, and never get tired of taking care of mamma, if He would only send her sometimes a real good time, the same as so many other little girls had. Now, think of that, Gracie! Isn't it sad that Sally should have to long for so much that many little people do not at all appreciate, because they have so much of it?"

Gracie's blue eyes were full of tears. "Oh, I wish I could make Sally have lots and lots and lots of good times!" she said.

"Well, darling, the wish is a kind one, and as you grow older you'll see many a 'poor Sally,' no doubt, whom you can help, in one way or another, to be happy, as Jesus gives you the opportunity. The thing for you to do is to look about you, and be kind and thoughtful,

and remember the Golden Rule, which is to do unto others as you would have others do to *you*, you know. I think Sally will be a very glad little girl soon, in regard to her mother, for I heard to-day that the doctor thinks she will be able to leave her bed soon, and, after a time, can take short walks. Won't Sally be glad then? I don't believe any little maid in the village will be as happy as she will be the first time she takes her mother out of doors."

That cheered Gracie's sympathetic heart very much, and she hoped it would not be very long before she and Sally together could take the invalid out to walk. Then she undressed Angelina and put her to bed, for Gracie never neglected her motherly duties, and she was, like all little girlies, devoted to her dolly, you know.

A day or two later Auntie Grace went to the village to make a call on one of her friends. Gracie pleaded to go with her, though Auntie hardly thought she would enjoy it as well as to stay at home and play with Blackie and the barn pets. But the little niece thought otherwise, so she was permitted to go.

She enjoyed the drive greatly; and when Aunt Grace allowed her to hold the reins and actually drive the phaeton pony herself, she was more than ever glad she had not stayed at home.

When they reached the village Auntie took the reins herself, and drove through a shaded street till she reached a house which stood facing an open green field, where some school children were playing ball.

"Now, which would you rather do," asked Auntie, "sit out here in the carriage, or go into the house, and perch yourself like a little lady on a chair and keep quiet as a mouse?"

"Oh, I can't be a mouse! I'm full of a restless feeling, Auntie, this very minute, and so—I guess, if you don't mind, I'll stay out here and watch the children play ball."

"Wise little maid!" laughed Aunt Grace, and presently Gracie was alone.

But before long Auntie came to the door and called her.

"Gracie, come here a moment, dear. I've told Mrs. Smith that you will gladly make yourself useful for a time, and play little nurse to her baby." And as Gracie ran to the piazza steps, wondering what her aunt meant, Mrs. Smith came out of the door with her pretty baby in her arms, and pushing a light baby carriage before her.

"This is Mrs. Smith, Gracie," said Auntie; "and, Mrs. Smith, this is my dear little niece and comfort, Gracie."

"How do you do, my dear?" said the lady, holding out her hand, into which Gracie shyly put her own little hand. "Your Auntie says you will enjoy keeping baby out here in the sunshine while she and I are having a good chance to talk, and it will be doing me a real favor, for baby's nurse is away sick, and I have been taking care of her and trying to attend to my other duties at the same time; and she is feeling a little fretful

to-day. But I really do not like to trouble you, and you must blame Auntie for this."

"I shan't *blame* Auntie!" said Gracie eagerly, holding out her arms to baby. "I shall just thank and thank her for asking you to let me do this. Oh, I do love babies! I love my dolly, but real babies are so dear and sweet!"

She stooped over the baby, who was by now seated in the little carriage, and strapped in safely, and kissed and petted it; and with great glee, and a feeling of dignified importance, the little girl wheeled her charge across the road, and up and down over the soft grass of the meadow opposite.

Baby was as good as a kitten, and crowed and laughed, and clapped her wee hands with joy, while the little nurse played with her merrily.

By and by Gracie decided to stand still and watch the ball game. "You'd like that, wouldn't you, baby?" she said; "for one of these days *you'll* be a big girl, and can throw a ball just as those girls and boys do."

She was careful not to stand where there was danger of the ball's coming their way, and soon found a safe position beside a huge sunflower bush, which attracted baby's bright eyes by its gaudy yellow bloom.

Auntie made a long call on her friend, and if Gracie had been alone in the phaeton all that time no doubt she would have grown weary and restless. But her pleasant position as little nurse was so enjoyable to her that she wondered "why Auntie had made such a wee

little short call," when at last she heard her own name called and saw Auntie beckoning to her with a smile.

She said good-by to baby quite reluctantly, and the baby's mother made her feel very happy by saying,

"Good-by, dear helpful child! You have done me a great service, and made baby so good and so glad that I'm sure she will give no trouble, or be fretful, for the rest of the day. Thank you many times, dearie!"

And those pleasant words nestled deep down in Gracie's heart, all the way back to the dear little cottage where Ann and supper were waiting.



Wheeling the baby while Auntie made her call on baby's mamma. Page 77.

CHAPTER XIII.

GRACIE'S GIFTS.

RACIE'S merry little visit to Auntie was about to end at last. She had had such a good time, and such a free, romping season of out-door life amid the sunbeams and the sweet breezes, and with the companionship of Benny, and now and then little busy Sally, that she felt very sorry to leave them all, and especially sorry to part with the "dearest Auntie Grace in the world." She had tried to be the very "bestest" little visitor that ever an auntie could have, and she had made herself so very dear to all members of Auntie's household that even Blackie the cat seemed sorrowful, and seeing the little trunk being packed, kept rubbing about it, and pushing up against Gracie's plump legs, and did an unusual amount of purring.

Gracie had been up to bid Granny good-by, and had said good-by to Sally, and to Sally's mother, who seemed really to be getting stronger every day, and had actually been out in the sunshine once or twice, with Granny's and Sally's help. That made Gracie very glad, you may be sure, and she promised Sally that she would try and come up the next summer for another visit with her Auntie, and they would all have good times again.

Of course, Gracie was so glad that she would soon see her own dear Mamma again, that it took away a little of the grief of parting with Auntie and her friends, and so her face wasn't quite so doleful as Benny's was when he came to see her the morning of her "last whole day," as she called it, with Auntie. He looked as if he could have cried, if he had been a girl; but, being a boy, he would only look doleful and keep saying "he wished she wouldn't go! he wished and wished and wished she wouldn't *ever* go!"

But Auntie invited him to come the next morning, bright and early, and drive with Gracie and herself down to the railroad station, and say good-by again as the train left, and then Gracie could wave her handkerchief to him, and he and Auntie could keep each other company on the way home again.

That invitation cheered him some, and he went away in a less doleful mood.

After he had gone, Auntie and Gracie were talking things over, and speaking of Sally and how many lonely times she had, and the fact that she had once confessed that she hadn't any playthings, and had never even owned such a thing as a doll, and Gracie said she wished she could do something for Sally that would make the poor little girl as glad as glad could be.

Auntie thought a moment; then she said: "I know what would make Sally the very happiest girl in the village, I think. It is something you could give her easily, if you felt that you could do so without grudging the gift."

"Why, Auntie," replied Gracie, "I'd give her the beautifullest thing that ever was, if I only had my toys here that I've got at home. But you see I haven't a single thing here to give her."

"Oh, but the thing I mean is better than a mere toy!" said Auntie. "It is something you like so well that—oh, I'm afraid you won't be willing to spare it!"

"Do you mean my big, bouncing ball that you bought me, Auntie? The lovely one that is as big as my head? Oh, you don't want me to give away your present, do you?"

"No, dear, I didn't mean that; though I would be willing, certainly, for you to give that away if you knew you would make any poor little person happier for it. I meant something far more precious to you than that ball."

Gracie looked puzzled, and tried to think what Auntie could mean, and then suddenly she saw Miss Angelina sitting in a chair near by, smiling and staring, and dressed in her fine traveling suit, all ready for the next day's journey.

The color flew quickly into Gracie's little face.

"Oh, Auntie! Auntie Grace! You don't mean Angelina? My lovely dolly! Oh, you *don't* mean Angelina? I never, never, *never* can part with her. Why, Auntie Grace Grey! how *could* I part with my dear dolly? You gave her to me so long ago, and she's my favorite child, and—oh, I really can't do it! I can't!"

"I didn't say you could, darling; I only said it would

make Sally happy if you gave her something, and I *did* mean Angelina, I'll acknowledge. Sally never has owned a doll, and she has admired yours, and I know has longed to take it in her little motherly arms every time she has seen you with it. But of course you need not give dolly away unless you really want to, and Sally can get along as she has always, before she ever saw Angelina."

But don't you suppose wise Auntie knew what she was about? Of course she did; and she wanted her little niece to be unselfish and generous in small as well as large things, and she knew that Gracie, though she loved Angelina best of all, had several other dollies at home, and would not, therefore, suffer any great loss.

Gracie was quite silent for a time, but afterward she rocked Angelina to sleep and laid her on her own little bed upstairs, and then went out into the garden all by herself and walked slowly down the path, thinking the matter over. Up and down she walked, her little face sober as her thoughts were, and nobody near her save the bees and butterflies, and the birdies over her golden head.

I can't take time to tell you all her thoughts; but so many kind ones popped, one after the other, into her head, that before long she ran back to the house, and up to her little room, and without stopping to do any more thinking, for fear she might change her mind, she woke Miss Angelina up, and dressed her in her best suit, and hugged and kissed her a few times, and wiped some

bright tear-drops from her own lashes, and then, with a pencil she found on Auntie's table, and a piece of paper that she took from the scrap basket, Gracie prepared a



“Gracie walked slowly down the path, thinking the matter over.” Page 83.

little note to Sally, which she tucked in Angelina's pocket. Of course the note was written in a very straggly style, and the spelling was peculiar,—according to the kind you might expect from a midget of Gracie's age;—but this is what she wrote, after much effort, but with sincere willingness; and I won't attempt to copy the spelling or the writing:

“DEAR LITTLE SALLY :—This is my dearest dolly, and I love her most to pieces. But Jesus says to my heart that you need Angelina more than I do, so I'm

giving her to you, and I hope you'll have good times with her. I'm going to put this in her pocket, so you'll be sure and find it. Good-by.

“GRACIE MOORE.”

Now, wasn't that a kind message to go with the gift to make Sally happy?

Then Gracie nearly fell downstairs in her haste to put her doll in Auntie's hands before she—Gracie—might want to change her mind; for, you see, she was making quite a sacrifice.

Brave Gracie! She saw Auntie wrap her treasure in soft paper and put it carefully in a box, and then she was taken close and snug in Auntie's arms and kissed, and she wondered what made her feel a tear on her forehead, when *she* wasn't crying at all, just now. Oh, no! she had given dolly up as cheerfully as she could, and she had felt sure in her heart that Jesus was pleased with her for doing so; and somehow that thought—and the feeling that Sally was going to be “so s'prised and glad”—made her feel as though she would rather laugh than cry. So I think the little tear-drop on her forehead must have fallen from Auntie Gracie's eyes when she was hugging the little niece so tightly. For, you see, that tender-hearted Auntie knew perfectly well what a sacrifice Gracie had made, and her own heart was very much touched by it. But she wanted her little niece to feel the pleasure that a true and generous sacrifice always leaves behind in one's heart, and to learn

the truth of the sentence, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." That is why this wise Auntie did not—as she might so easily have done—buy a doll for Sally, and let Gracie keep Angelina.

Well, now that Gracie had tasted the pleasure of self-sacrifice, and of ungrudgingly giving, she felt like going on with it, and so she presently said to Auntie:

"I think *Benny* ought to have something, Auntie, that will make him happy, and I'm going to give him my big ball, 'cause you said you wouldn't care if I gave it to make somebody glad, you know. Don't you think I'd better let him have it, Auntie, dearie?"

"Well, now, darling, I can't think of anything that would please Benny boy better than to be the owner of that ball. How glad I am that you thought of it, dear!"

"Yes; and you know, Auntie, how he liked to play with it the other day in the meadow, and said it was big enough to be a real football for boys. Oh, I'm sure he'll be glad!"

So off ran Gracie, all in a glow of zeal for Benny's pleasure, and presently the gay-colored ball—it was really a very handsome one, painted to resemble all the colors of the rainbow, and quite an artistic affair, I can assure you—was in Auntie's hands and being wrapped carefully in tissue paper, to be placed beside the gift for Sally till the grand presentation day.

Gracie felt so happy, and it was such an unusual sort of happiness, too, that she almost forgot to grieve over the

fact that she and her "dearest Auntie in all the world" were to be so soon separated.

But you see, my little reader, it is always so when we once learn the happiness of sharing pleasure with others, and going without ourselves, in order to give to those who are less fortunate than we are. Because the pleasure we *give* returns with double force to our own hearts, and in the joy of others we find our own joy increased. If you aren't quite sure that I am right about that, you just try it yourself at the first opportunity you have, and see if you don't feel like doing it right over again upon the very next chance.

Well, after supper, when the beautiful day was fading softly into shadowland, and the distant hills were beginning to look hazy and purple, and the birds in the tree-tops were twittering and crooning themselves to sleep, our little Gracie and Auntie had a last walk up and down the garden path, while they talked lovingly together, and Gracie told her how happy she had been, and how much better she felt in her heart than before she left home; for, she said at last, "I s'pose I used to be selfish 'cause I didn't *think* much. But I'll try never to be so again."

CHAPTER XIV.

“GOOD-BY! GOOD-BY!”

EARLY the next morning Gracie went out to the yard to take leave of her pets. She patted old Dobbin on his fat sides, and on his nose, which she could not have reached if he had not put his big head close down to her to show his affection.

She kissed old mooly cow's soft white nose, and rubbed her between the horns, as the gentle cow came to the meadow fence and put her head as far over it as possible, so that Gracie could reach her.

Then there were Blackie the cat, old Whitey the motherly hen, and her fluffy new babies, to say nothing of the yellow babies half grown up.

And there was also Fido, who had scampered ahead of his master, wagging his tail and barking, either for joy or sorrow, nobody could tell just which, as he rushed to meet his little girl friend. He had, of course, to have his full share of caresses and farewell hugs, and then she wanted to throw some crumbs to the pigeons and the friendly birdies, which were no more afraid of Gracie than if she had been a pigeon or a birdie herself.

By that time along came Benny, with a look in his eyes as though he had been wiping away some tears

during the walk through the lane from home. But of course he didn't know that there were any tell-tale traces of such doings, and he greeted Gracie with a merry "Hello!" which—if Gracie had not seen the signs in those bright eyes which I have told of—might have made her think that after all Benny wasn't sorry she was going away.

But she pretended she saw nothing unusual, and echoed his greeting cheerily, and then Auntie called that John must put Dobbin in harness and get himself ready to drive them to the station.

So Gracie ran to the kitchen door and bade the nice old fat cook good-by, and was nearly smothered in the warm embrace she received in return. Ann came to the door of the piazza with Gracie's little jacket and hat, and received a good-by also, which she returned as cook had, and finally John came along with the carriage.

Benny sprang in and took the reins, while John put the small trunk in front. Gracie got in behind, to sit with Auntie, and, last of all, Auntie herself got in, and took Gracie's wee hand tightly in her own, and the little girl, whose throat began to feel lumpy, snuggled close up against the dear Auntie, and winked back a few tears which kept blurring her eyes so she couldn't see plainly in front of her.

There was very little talking done, for somehow Benny and Gracie didn't feel so much like "chatterboxes" just then, and John, of course, had no occasion for remark, though he did some *thinking*, you may believe; and as

for Auntie Grace, she, too, was thinking, and somehow felt little like talking, for her dearly loved little niece's going away was sure to make the cottage a lonely place to return to, after the train stopped at the station and sped away again.

But presently, as the carriage turned a bend in the road where a glimpse of a pretty lake was caught,—(Gracie had been to that lake one day with Sally and Benny and Granny, for it wasn't very far from Sally's house, and the children had enjoyed playing amongst the rocks there),—Benny exclaimed:

“Oh, Gracie! I see Sally and her mother standing over there by the rocks! See them?”

Gracie and Auntie looked eagerly across the pond, and, sure enough, there they were, Sally and her mother, watching the opposite bank, along which they had known the carriage must pass on its way to the station.

The invalid mother had felt strong enough to take the short walk with Sally, and watch for the passing by of Sally's little friend; and though the distance was too far for even a shout to be heard distinctly, yet they could catch the longed-for glimpse of Gracie, and she could see and appreciate the fact of their having gone there to see her pass.

She waved her handkerchief, and, as soon as they saw her, Sally waved her hands for good-by, and the mother waved her apron.

Then another turn in the road was reached, and Gracie could see them no more.



Sally and her mother were watching. Page 90.

When the station was reached, there were the good-by words, and the checking of the little trunk, and the waiting for the train, which Benny secretly hoped had broken down on the way. But at last it came puffing along, and there was only time for more last dear kisses, and more last fond messages, and a hasty glance from Auntie to see if Gracie's ticket were safely pinned inside her pocket, and, at the very last, the little kiss which Benny dropped on her hand,—not venturing to touch her cheek,—before the bell rang, and the train moved out from the platform, and left Auntie and Benny waving and throwing kisses after it, to the sweet and half-frightened face which poked itself out of the car window, till a turn in the road hid it entirely.

Then, without waiting to drive back with Miss Grey, lonely little Benny ran as fast as he could back from the road into the woods, and there, out of sight of everybody, he dropped on the ground, and had a good, boyish cry, for he loved Gracie well, and he knew he should miss her more and more every day.

"She was just like a truly sister," he sobbed to himself, "and—and I never will see any little girl in this place half as good and sweet as Gracie Moore!"

And in the ears of Auntie Grace, as she was driving back to her home,—after having looked for Benny in vain,—rang the echoes of a plaintive little voice calling from the car window: "Good-by! Good-by, dear Auntie and dear Benny! Good-by!"

CHAPTER XV.

HOME AGAIN!

WO days after Gracie had reached home, and had delighted Mamma and Papa with the improvement in her health and strength, there came a letter for her from Auntie Grace.

Gracie kissed the handwriting first, and then sat beside mamma to hear it read.

“DARLING LITTLE GIRLIE [ran the letter]: You’ve no idea how we miss you here, and Auntie actually had a little cry when she got back from the station and found no Gracie here. Ah, well! dearie, you were a blessed little visitor, and made us all happy, and Mamma will be sure to give you a kiss when she reads this. [Sure enough, Mamma leaned over, right on the instant, and kissed her little girl.] Now, let me tell you [the letter went on] how delighted Sally and Benny were when I took your gifts to them. Why, Sally could hardly believe her eyes, and when she held Angelina in her arms she sobbed out these words: ‘Oh, Miss Grey! tell Miss Gracie that I never was so happy in all my life, and I shall ask God to bless her forever and ever. Oh, my beautiful dolly! all my very own! Oh, Miss

Grey! don't you s'pose Jesus is blessing Miss Gracie this very minute for making a poor girl like me so glad?' Well, I loved my little niece more than ever, for being so generous to Sally, you may be sure. And Benny! Why, he opened his eyes as big as a cook's biggest saucers almost, and then he gave the loudest kind of 'whoopee!' and tossed that ball way up in the air for sheer delight. 'Now, if I could only toss it up to the sky, and show those white cloud-angels the lovely thing dear Gracie has given to me, I'd just love to do it, Miss Grey,' said he, and then he wiped his eyes on his jacket sleeve and pretended he had dust in them. But if it was dust that made them water, then the dust had a *diamond* in it, for I saw it sparkle. So now, you see, you have left two happy children to long for you and miss you till you come again. Good-by, darling! Kiss Mamma for me, and tell her to kiss you for your lonely

"AUNTIE GRACE."

With the close of Auntie's letter I must now close my story, and I hope my little readers have enjoyed with Gracie her

"MERRY LITTLE VISIT WITH AUNTIE."

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